

African American Inventors: Patricia Bath

by RV Staff Writer A.A.

Dr. Patricia Bath was the first black woman medical doctor to receive a patent in the United States. She now holds four patents for her inventions, which are related to preventing and restoring sight in patients. Born in 1942, she was raised in the Harlem area of New York City. She was inspired early in her life by the work of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, a medical missionary to Africa. She decided to study medicine. She graduated in 1968 from Howard University College of Medicine.

Dr. Bath returned to Harlem as a medical intern. It was there that she saw that many poor people and black people were becoming blind because of the lack of eye care. She decided to concentrate on ophthalmology, which is the branch of medicine that works with eye diseases and disorders. As her career progressed, Dr. Bath taught in medical schools and trained other doctors. In 1978 she was one of the founders of the the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness, and served as its president. Its principle is that “eyesight is a basic human right.”

In 1981, Dr. Bath invented a laser that could remove a cataract, which is a cloudiness in the lens of the eye. Cataracts are a leading cause of blindness. Her other inventions also work with removing cataracts, making the removal faster, better, and safer.

Dr. Bath is now retired from teaching. She continues her work to help all people see better.

Questions

1. Where did Dr. Bath grow up?
2. Who inspired Dr. Bath to become study medicine?
3. What is ophthalmology?
4. How many patents does Dr. Bath have?
5. What is a cataract?